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ABSTRACT

A study of 95 high school principals and assistant principals (59 males and 36 females) in three large urban school districts examined the influence of gender and role on administrative decision-making. Subjects were asked to make decisions (choose from among four possible responses) about how they would respond to five different (gender-related) situations commonly encountered in secondary schools. Scenarios ranged from situations involving handling school policy infractions and scheduling changes to choosing representatives and tackling inappropriate teacher behavior. Respondents were also asked to choose among word pairs representing differing gender-loaded preferences, such as "efficiency/harmony." As a whole, results do not find gender a salient factor in high school principals' approach to decision making. The responses of female and male administrators were more alike than different--in both scenarios and word choices. In the two process-oriented scenarios, females were likely to operate more democratically, but the same percentage of males and females chose an autocratic response to the choice-of-representative scenario. The overall pattern of similar, if not identical, results suggests that role influences administrative decision making more than gender. Racial factors are also discussed. Contains 36 references and a sample questionnaire. (MLH)

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EXPLORING THE BOUNDARIES OF GENDER AND ROLE IN ADMINISTRATIVE DECISION-MAKING

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EXPLORING THE BOUNDARIES OF GENDER AND ROLES IN ADMINISTRATIVE DECISION-MAKING

Decision-making is at the heart of administration. It has variously been described as "the most important function a manager must perform (Braverman, 1980, 1)," "the first managerial skill ((Drucker, 1974, 465)," and "the core of the administrative process (Sergiovanni, 1980, 354)." A large, spirited body of literature exists about leadership and administrative decision-making, not the least of which addresses the effect of gender on the process--- to contradictory conclusions. On the one hand, it is argued that there are gender-specific differences in the way males and females lead; that female leadership is more collaborative and participatory, that it is characterized by lower needs for control, and the use of intuition and empathy in problem-solving (Loden, 1985), that "they make people feel important, included and energized (and)...share information (Rosener, 1990)." Further, it is suggested that the ways in which females lead are more consonant with the ways organizations *should* be led (Aburdene and Naisbitt, 1993; Bell and Chase, 1989; Chase, 1995; Cioci, et al., 1991; Cohen, 1989; Helgeson, 1991; Marshall and Mitchell, 1989; Pounder, 1990; Shakeshaft, 1987; Tannen, 1990). On the other hand, a no less compelling argument is made for no differences (Astin and Leland, 1992; Bartol and Martin, 1986; Berman, 1982; Bolman and Deal, 1992a,b; Charters and Jovick, 1981; Dobbins and Platz, 1986; Eagly and Johnson, 1990; Grimes and Sloan, 1984; Harlan and Weiss, 1982; Rozgony, 1983; Trout, 1985), or slight gender-specific differences, more attributable to role accommodation (by females) than gender (Eagly, et al., 1992).

In a study of decision-making by practicing and aspiring administrators, Mertz and McNeely (1993) found gender to be unrelated to the decisions practicing male and female school administrators (superintendents, principals, supervisors) made to commonly encountered school situations. The responses of female and male practicing administrators were virtually indistinguishable. While the responses of aspiring administrators were more varied, gender was not a factor in the variation. The researchers posited that role might be more influential than gender in the decision-making process; that the norms and demands of the position might override possible differences in disposition brought to the process. This notion finds theoretical support in the literature (Berman, 1982; Bolman and Deal, 1992; Eagly and Steffen, 1986; Eagly and Wood, 1991; Eagly, et al., 1992; Greenfield, 1995; Johnson, 1993; Lott and Maluso, 1993; Marshall and Mitchell, 1989), and it is a compelling notion from the standpoint of practitioners in the field. The present study emerged from the dual context of interest in and curiosity about the contradictory conclusions that have been reached about the relationship between gender and decision-making, the include other possible variables besides gender that may play a role in consideration of gender and leadership, and the

suggestive notion of the primacy of role over gender encountered in the literature and in our research.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of gender and role on administrative decision-making. In doing so, the researchers sought to hold role constant, at least in so far as it was possible, and to look directly at gender as the critical variable.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the researchers chose to use high school administrators as the subjects of the study. High school administrators were selected because, comparatively speaking, the role of high school administrator has been clearly delineated, making role a more apparent constant (NASSP, 1978,1979). Further, there was a desire to add to the literature about gender and secondary school administrators since so much more of the gender/administrator research has been done with and on elementary administrators. In order to maximize the likelihood of diversity in respondents, high school administrators in large, urban districts were sought. Both of these design decisions frame and limit the applicability and generalizability of the findings, but they also allow a reasoned beginning exploration of the question underlying the purpose of the study: What role does gender play in the decision-making process of high school administrators?

High school principals and assistant principals (n=188) in the three large, urban school districts in one southeastern state were selected as the subjects for the study. Following procedures identified by each of the three districts for gaining approval for the conduct of a study in the district, the names, titles, school and school location for each high school principal and assistant principal were secured. A form for respondents to complete and a cover letter from the researchers addressing the nature of the study were addressed to each potential subject, and distributed by the school district along with a letter from the district sanctioning the study and voluntary principal participation in it. Responses were to be mailed directly to the researchers in a prepaid, addressed envelope.

The form constructed for getting at administrator decision-making was brief (two

pages), to enhance the likelihood of subject participation, and consisted of two parts: scenarios and word choices. Subjects were asked to make decisions (choose from among four possible responses) about what they perceived they would do in response to five different situations commonly encountered in secondary schools. The scenarios were drawn from situations reported by school administrators and developed specifically with an eye to engendering gender-related responses, as they have been identified in the literature (e.g., commitment/separation (Marshall and Mitchell, 1989); autocratic/participatory (Eagly, et al., 1992); interpersonal/task (Eagly, et al., 1992; Shakeshaft, 1987). The "decisions" from which the respondents could choose were also drawn from practitioner reports of what might be reasonable and acceptable to do. Respondents were asked to "choose the response that best represents what you would do" in each situation. Following the scenarios, respondents were asked to choose from among pairs of words representing differing concepts, e.g., efficiency or harmony. The choices were drawn from ideas identified in the literature as related to perceived gender differences, including moral orientation (Gilligan, 1977). Eight of the 10 pairs had word choices in which one word has been associated with females, and the other with males. In 2 of the 10 pairs, the differentiating is less clearly associated with one gender or the other. Respondents were asked to choose the "word in each pair that appeals to you more." The word choices were designed to get at dispositions/preferences related to decision-making from a different perspective and level of abstraction than might be derived from the school decision-making scenarios. The form ended with a request for demographic information: school district, gender, race, position, years in position, years in administration, Meyers-Briggs type, if known, and highest degree earned. The respondents' names were not sought. (A copy of the form is attached.)

Responses were secured from 95 respondents (51% return). There was a 49% return from District A (n=38), 52% return from District B (n=27), and a 60% return from District C (n=30). Thus, district A constituted 40% of the subject sample, B, 28%, and C, 32%. This is comparable to their relative size. The respondents included 59 males and 36 females. Of these, 35 (39%) were African -Americans (14 female; 21 male) and 58 (61%) were Caucasian (22 female; 36 male). Within district, 24% of the respondents from district A were African-American females (n=9) and 45% were African-American males (n=17). In district B, 11% were African-American females (n=3) and 15% were African-American males (n=4). In district C, 7% were African-American females (n=2) and no African-American males in the district responded to the survey.

Thirty-five per cent of the respondents were principals (n= 33; 15 females and 18

males), and 65% were assistant principals (n=60; 21 females and 39 males). (Two respondents did not indicate their positions.) While 15 respondents held doctoral degrees and one held a bachelor's degree, the vast majority held master's degrees and master's plus 30 or 45 hours. The respondents averaged 12.19 years in administration, ranging from .5 years to 32 years. Only four respondents could identify their Meyers-Briggs Type.

Data from the scenarios and word choices were analyzed in terms of gender, race, school district, position and years in administration using simple statistical procedures. The resulting data were then examined for patterns in relation to the purpose of the study.

FINDINGS

Scenarios The five scenarios engendered somewhat different results in terms of gender and race, although in no case were differences identifiable on the basis of school district, education, or years in position. The first scenario identified a school policy (being in the halls during class change) and asked the respondents how they would handle the confirmed failure of some teachers to follow the policy. Overwhelmingly, (89% of females; 84% of males) the respondents chose to "speak individually with the teachers who have missed their duty," over any other option (meet with them as a group; wait and see; address the problem at the next faculty meeting). Each of the other options received negligible responses, except that 12% of the males chose to address the problem at the next faculty meeting. There were no differences in the responses on the basis of race.

The second scenario engendered differences on the basis of gender, but not of race. The scenario asked the respondents how they would go about choosing a representative to participate in a special institute. The choices involved choosing the representative themselves (a), allowing the staff to select the representative (b), consulting their administrative team about the representative (c), or attending themselves (d). Fifty-three per cent of the males and 35% of the females chose consulting with their administrative team (c), while 38% of the females and only 18% of the males chose letting the staff choose the representative (b). Both males and females chose some measure of participatory decision-making, however males, and a sizeable group of females, favored a more restrictive process (administrative team; consult) over a less restrictive, more democratic process (allow the staff to choose). Greater differences on the basis of gender emerged in the choices of a.(choose yourself) and d (go yourself). Only 9 % of the males, but 19% of the females said that they would choose the representative.

Conversely, 20% of the males, but only 8% of the females said they would attend themselves.

Scenario three posed a problem related to the loss of a position and the creation of next year's schedule. The choices pit telling the department involved (a), against asking the department what to do (b), against deciding but not telling anyone until the end of the year (c), against doing nothing and waiting to see if maybe the position would be saved (d). Amongst male respondents, 44% chose telling the department what decision they had made, and 31% chose asking the department what to do. Conversely, 49% of females chose asking the department, and 31% chose telling. Few respondents chose waiting and allowing the staff to find out at the end of the year (9% of males; 3% of females), and few males chose acting as if the position were not lost (5.5%), however 17% of females chose this response. The responses were not distinguishable on the basis of race.

Scenario four asked the respondents what they would do in the case of a teacher experiencing personal problems that were interfering with her classroom performance. Responses were widely spread out amongst three of the four choices and highly similar on the basis of gender, but not race. Thirty-eight per cent of males and 46% of females chose calling her in and telling her you would give her any assistance she needs (b); 31% of males and 26% of females chose telling her she needs help and that you are arranging for her to get assistance to get her work back on track (c); and 29% of males and 26% of females chose telling her she needs to focus more on her teaching and put her personal problems behind her and you will provide any help you can to do so (d). Only 2% of females and no males chose letting the situation go on in the hope that it would get better (a). For African-American respondents, while they chose the same three responses as Caucasians, the predominant choice was d, telling her she needs to put her personal problems behind her and you will provide any help you can to do so. While that ranked as the third choice amongst Caucasians, it was the first choice amongst African-Americans. Fifty percent of female and male African-Americans chose that response.

Scenario five asked respondents what they would do about a teacher who constantly questioned everything they did. The responses of all participants were similar, irrespective of gender or race. Sixty-four per cent of males and 42% of females chose talking to her in private about her inappropriate behavior (a); however, 25% of males and 36% of females would let it be known in a faculty meeting that they did <u>not</u> find her behavior to be inappropriate and that they welcomed staff members questioning their decisions (d). Eleven per cent of

males and 22% of females indicated they would ignore the behavior (c). None of the respondents chose "putting her in her place in a faculty meeting..."

Word-Choices The ten pairs of words from which respondents were to choose pit "preferences" associated with females and males against one another. The words generally associated with females included facilitating, helpful, inclusive harmony, empathize, reflect, compassion, relationships. The companion words generally associated with males include correct, informative, decisive, efficiency, organize, act, duty, rights. Two of the three word choices pit less clearly associated words against one another, change/maintain, and question/answer.

Three patterns of responses emerged: a clear, strong choice by respondents irrespective of gender or race (6 of 10 pairs); respondent choices differentiated by race, but not by gender (1 of 10 pairs); and respondent choices differentiated by race and the intersection of gender (3 of 10 pairs). Differences did not emerge on the basis of school district or years in position

Irrespective of race or gender, respondents chose facilitating over correct (74% of males; 80% of females) (female associated); efficiency over harmony (65% of males; 69% of females) (male-associated); act over reflect (59% of males; 74% of females) (male-associated); organize over empathize (84% of males; 74% of females) (male-associated); relationships over rights (82% of males and 82% of females) (female-associated); and change over maintain (71% of males; 80% of females; unclear association). Interestingly enough, with respect to this last choice, change was an even stronger choice for African-American males and females than for Caucasians. One hundred per cent of the African-American females and 88% of the African-American males chose change over maintain. For Caucasians, 63% of males and 68% of females made that choice.

In choosing between inclusive(female-associated) and decisive (male-associated) African-American males and females overwhelmingly chose inclusive (65% and 69% respectively). In contrast, the majority of Caucasian males chose decisive (61%) and Caucasian females were evenly split between the two responses (50% each).

In choosing between helpful (female-associated) and informative (male-associated), 75% of Caucasian males, 64% of Caucasian females, and 53% of African-American males chose helpful. In contrast, 75% of African-American females chose informative. Similarly, in choosing between duty and compassion, Caucasian and African-American males and Caucasian females overwhelmingly chose compassion, the female-associated word, over duty (67%, 73%, and 77%

respectively). In striking contrast, 67% of African-American females chose duty, the male-associated word. And in contrast to the two preceding instances, in choosing between question and answer (unclear association), while female responses were less strongly differentiated than male responses, African-American females and Caucasian females and males preferred answer (54%, 55%, and 61% respectively), and African-American males overwhelmingly chose question (69%).

The word-choices made by respondents did not appear to be differentiated on the basis of gender. In the majority of cases, as many male-associated as female-associated words were chosen by the respondents. And where differences did emerge, race and the intersection of race and gender (African-American males in contrast with African-American females) were the distinguishing factors.

IMPLICATIONS

Looked at as a whole, the results do not appear to support a conclusion that gender is a salient factor in the way high school principals think about and make decisions in and about their work. Indeed, the responses of male and female administrators in the study were more alike than different--to both the scenarios and the word-choices. Where one might have expected to encounter clear differences between females and males in their preference for certain concepts or actions, no such clear differences emerged globally. Males and females tended to choose similar actions, in similar rank order, and to prefer the same ideas to comparable degrees. Indeed, the range of choices was more varied within gender than between gender, particularly where race was factored in.

This would appear to be consistent with the findings that males and females who occupy similar positions tend to operate similarly (Bolman and Deal, 1992). As Eagly and Johnson (1990) concluded:

> When social behavior is regulated by other, less diffuse social roles, as it is in organizational settings, behavior should primarily reflect the influence of these other roles and therefore lose much of its gender-stereotypic character (249).

Given that the role of high school administrator is relatively clearly defined, and that entrance into its ranks is controlled through the selection process, it may not be surprising for role occupants to tend to hold or at least to profess similar responses to role-related questions.

However, having said this, the results are not as clear cut as they may sound, and close scrutiny of the responses to the scenarios suggests a subtle difference in response on the basis of gender that has also found support in the literature. The scenarios presented the respondents with basically two types of issues: problem situations in which the administrator had to decide *what* to do--outcome focused (take action, avoid action, kind of action); and decision-making situations in which the administrator had to decide *how* to make the decision--process focused (make the decision alone, involve others). In the three outcome-focused situations females were as likely as males to address the problem directly, deal with the individual one-on-one, confront the uncomfortable situation. However, in the two process-focused situations, while the majority of females and females tended to involve others in the process, suggesting they were more participatory in decision-making style, females were more likely than males to allow their staff to make the decision, while males were more likely to "consult with" their administrative staff. While respondents may have seen either response as allowing them to make the final decision, the choice of group to include (staff for females; administrative for males) and the implications of choosing a response that looked to the staff to make the decision (females) or the administrative team to provide their view (males), is quite different. While female responses to the process-focused scenarios were more likely to be participatory and democratic in character than males, males and females were as likely to be autocratic in their style, at least as seen in the responses to the two process-focused scenarios. Approximately the same percentage of males and females chose an autocratic response to scenario 2, however, even in this there was a difference in the nature of the decision made. Females chose the "best representative," and males chose to attend themselves.

The finding that females tend to operate more democratically is consistent with findings of meta-analyses of a wide range of studies of principals (Eagly, et al., 1992) and studies conducted across organizations (Eagly and Johnson, 1990). As they concluded, "women who occupy the principal role are more likely than men to treat teachers and other organizational subordinates as colleagues and equals and to invite their participation in decision making (Eagly, et al., 1992, 91)."

However, it would be inappropriate to take this evidence of difference too far. . As they also point out, "female principals tended to adopt leadership styles that are less female sterotypic...to the extent that they were relatively rare in their roles (93)." While females are no longer as rare as they once were in high school administration, they are still the less-likely to be found in the position than are males, and the position remains male-dominated and male-defined. The small difference in leadership style, which may represent a difference in disposition

and/or may represent accommodation to norms of acceptable behavior for females in male-dominated positions, as suggested by Eagly, et al. (1992), is not sufficient to warrant the conclusion that females and males act differently in the same position. The overall pattern of similar (albeit not identical) results on the basis of gender is more suggestive of the influence of role than gender, at least at this point in time.

The findings that appeared in the word-choices related to the intersection of race and gender were both interesting and unexpected. In three pairs, within race differences between males and females were greater than differences between races or within the other race. African-American females tended to choose male-associated words (informative, duty) over female-associated words (helpful and compassion), although African-American males did not. It is interesting to consider the possible extent to which these choices may reflect socio-cultural differences between African-Americans and Caucasians, differences we are just beginning to truly acknowledge. The finding offers intriguing questions to investigate about the impact of race and race and gender on role behavior.

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ATTACHMENT
SECONDARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIVE DECISION-MAKING

IN EACH SITUATION CHOOSE THE RESPONSE THAT BEST REPRESENTS WHAT YOU WOULD DO

School policy requires a teacher to be in the hallway during class change. You made a schedule of assignments for all teachers which was distributed and explained during a faculty meeting a month ago. It has been brought to your attention that some teachers are no longer in the halls during their assigned times. You investigate and confirm the facts. Do you

____ a. Call the teachers who missed the duty into your office for a meeting as a group
____ b. Speak individually with the teachers who have missed their duty
____ c. Wait and see if they continue to be absent in the halls
____ d. Address the problem in the next faculty meeting

Your school has just been given an opportunity to send a representative to the Harvard Summer Institute on Excellence in Education free of charge. This is a unique and wonderful opportunity. Enrollment is limited to 30 selected individuals nationwide and the cost institute is normally $3,500.00 per registrant. This institute has received national acclaim and using the training received there educators have caused their schools to be "reborn". In selecting your school's representative do you

____ a. Appoint the best representative of your school
____ b. Allow your staff to select the representative
____ c. Consult your administrative team and collectively select the representative
____ d. Attend yourself as you are in the best position to take advantage of the information to be gained from the institute

You have just been informed that you will lose an English position in the fall. The last hired will be the one to leave and this means that someone else will have to teach ninth grade basic next year. It also means that teachers in one grade will have to carry a heavier load. It is March and next year's schedule must be made now. Do you

____ a. Call an English Department meeting , tell them the news and then tell them what you have decided to do
____ b. Call an English Department meeting and ask them what to do
____ c. Decide what to do and let everyone find out at the end of the year
____ d. Schedule as if no position will be lost. If enrollment increases slightly the position will be kept and anyway, it is always harder to remove a position if it has been previously scheduled

Mrs. Sams is going through a divorce and is having serious problems adjusting to the situation. You spoke with her two months ago and saw how upset she was at that time. Her husband had suddenly quit his job and left town. He had taken all of their savings and refused to talk with her or the children. She continues to have great difficulty in the classroom; sending five or six discipline referrals each week. It seems her personal life is affecting her ability to control her class. Some parents have even called questioning the lack of academic focus in her class. Would you

____ a. Let the situation go a little longer in the hope that she will gain control of her life and correct the situation if given a little time
____ b. Call her in and let her know of your concerns for her. Tell her that you are here for her and will give her any assistance she needs
___ c. Call her in and tell her the problems you see that she is having in her class. Tell her you believe she needs help and that you are making arrangements for her to receive assistance getting her work back on track
____ d. Talk with her and tell her that she has let a personal problem become a school problem. Assure her of your support but tell her that she needs to focus more on her teaching and put her personal problems behind her. You will provide any help you can.

Brenda Simmons has questioned everything you have done in your six months as principal at Eastwood High. No item on the faculty meeting agenda is too small for her scrutiny. Every day there is a new question. It seems as if she has been on your back from the moment you first arrived at school. She never disobeys the rules or fails to follow through on her responsibilities, but she always questions everything you say. She is a good teacher and her students like her. She has always had students place in math competitions. Parents seem to like her and she always speaks positively about the school. So, she does have her good points.

After the meeting this afternoon, you overhear some teachers talking about Brenda's constant challenges to your authority. The staff was now talking! After some thinking you realize that she isn't going to change or stop asking pointed questions. Giving the situation some thought, you decide to . . .

____ a. Talk to her in private and point out the inappropriateness of her behavior.
____ b. Put her in her place in a faculty meeting so that she, and other faculty members, would see that you are in control.
____ c. Ignore it and do nothing.
____ d. Let it be known in a faculty meeting that you do not find Brenda's behavior to be inappropriate and that you encourage staff members to question and understand policy and administrative decisions.

CIRCLE THE ONE WORD IN EACH PAIR THAT APPEALS TO YOU MORE

1.	correct	facilitating	6.	reflect	act
2.	helpful	informative	7.	change	maintain
3.	inclusive	decisive	8.	duty	compassion
4.	efficiency	harmony	9.	rights	relationships
5.	empathize	organize	10.	question	answer

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION

School District:_____ Position:(check one) ___Principal ___Assistant Principal

Gender:(check one)___male ___female Years in position:_____

Race:_____ Years in administration:_____

Myers-Briggs type:(if known)_____ Highest degree earned:_____